



Assistant Commandant's Perspective



by REAR ADM. T. H. GILMOUR
Assistant Commandant for Prevention

The U.S. Coast Guard has a long tradition of service to our nation in peace and war. Our service is unique in that we provide national level capabilities with international reach to safeguard our country from safety, security, and environmental threats. At the same time, we operate in the communities we serve, interacting on a daily basis with those who conduct their business on our nation's waterways and along our coasts.

We put a lot of effort into preventing bad things from happening, but, unfortunately, they still happen. When they do, we must always be prepared to respond to them, whether these are man made or natural emergencies. The Coast Guard's response role was very evident recently in the immediate aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, where images of Coast Guard rescues were shown on news media for several weeks. We are, of course, very proud of the Coast Guard men and women who performed so well during this crisis and who rescued or evacuated over 33,000 residents from hurricane-affected areas.

Like most major events, there is also another dimension to the story. Although it may not have received the attention accorded to the rescues, the restoration of our waterways and the critical marine infrastructure vital to our domestic and international trade is nevertheless of prime importance to our nation. Clearly, the Coast Guard played a major role in this effort. The majority of the Aids to Navigation on these waterways were destroyed or unreliable and needed to be quickly replaced. Our federal partners, in particular the Army Corps of Engineers, Navy Supervisor of Salvage, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, and Environmental Protection Agency, were especially critical to clearing channels and restoring commerce. However, one aspect of the recovery that is little appreciated outside the maritime community is the essential role played by industry in this restoration and recovery effort.

Industry volunteers worked tirelessly alongside government officials in assessing waterways and identifying hazards. With over 2,000 vessels sunk or stranded by the storms, this was a monumental feat! Often, long portions of waterways were conditionally opened, based solely on industry surveys that were performed from vessels owned and operated by the private sector. With their unique understanding of complex maritime supply chains, industry partners provided advice that helped the Coast Guard Captains of the Port assign priorities for the use of government resources. If the response to Katrina and Rita is viewed as a success story for the Coast Guard, it is also a success story for our industry partners who worked so closely and effectively with us.

This brings us to the theme of this issue of *Proceedings*: industry success stories. Our positive working relationships with industry are clearly beneficial during dramatic responses, like those described above. But in a more consistent way, these relationships make a difference every day through formal and informal efforts to improve safety, security, and environmental protection. The Coast Guard and industry share many of the same goals. Preventing bad things from happening is a good use of government resources; it is also good business practice, with significant advantages to a company's bottom line. Experience has shown that the most consistent improvements in safety occur only where there is a commitment to do so by those who own and operate the ships, boats, and facilities. We are happy to take this opportunity to showcase a few examples where our industry partners have made, and continue to make, a major difference.

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